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B-1 crew receives Distinguished Flying Cross for leadership strike

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ELLSWORTH AIR FORCE BASE, S.D. (ACCNS) -- Four Ellsworth B-1 crew members that struck a "target of opportunity" believed to be the site of a high-level Iraqi leadership meeting April 7, received Distinguished Flying Crosses from Lt. Gen. T. Michael Moseley, the Operation Iraqi Freedom Combined Forces Air Component commander, this week at a forward operating location.

Capt. Chris Wachter, aircraft commander; Capt. Sloan Hollis, pilot; and weapon systems officers 1st Lt. Joe Runci, and Lt. Col. Fred Swan flew the bomber, nicknamed "Seek and Destroy."

During the almost 11-hour sortie, the crew struck 17 separate targets using two versions of precision-guided munitions.

According to the citation, the B-1 was engaged in midair refueling when a call came from an airborne control aircraft telling them "this is the big one" and directing them to the new priority target. Twelve minutes later four weapons struck the target.



Capt. Chris Wachter (left), aircraft commander, Capt. Sloan Hollis, pilot, Lt. Col. Fred Swan, weapons systems officer and 1st Lt. Joe Runci, weapons systems officer stand in front of a B-1. They were recently awarded Distinguished Flying Crosses for their actions to destroy a priority Baath Party leadership target on April 7. The citation accompanying the award read that the crew's actions marked the beginning of the rapid collapse of the Iraqi regime and the fall of Baghdad. (Courtesy photo)

Note: Click on image for higher-resolution copy.

The crew then struck six additional sites within 15 minutes of hitting the leadership target in the Iraqi capital. With 14 weapons remaining and approximately 20 minutes of loiter fuel left, the crew received nine more targets, which included missiles, radars and support vehicles for a surface to air missile system in Tikrit. They successfully struck all nine in one pass, again within 15 minutes of receiving the target coordinates.

“These medals are a testament to this airframe and its crews,” said Col. James Kowalski, the 405th Air Expeditionary Wing commander. “They’re simply the best at what they do; they continue to prove it.”

To date, Ellsworth B-1s have flown 432 sorties in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and Southern Watch, dropped more than 4.5 million pounds of munitions and sustained a mission capable rate of 80 percent.

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